

Testimony for Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee
Wednesday, February 5, 2025
SB0567 – Criminal Procedure – District Court Commissioners
FAVORABLE

Dear Honorable Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and committee members:

My name is Beverly John. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of my family and community. I am a concerned community member, as well as a member of the Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability and the Prince George's County Coalition for Police Accountability.

I was here in Annapolis supporting my friends and colleagues who testified for this legislation last session. Little did I know I would find myself here this year, testifying for my daughter after she became a victim of a jealous woman who maliciously filed charge against her. There was no investigation into the incredible allegations. The State's Attorney did not prosecute. But now we are left seeking expungement before her employment is jeopardized.

We support HB0021 because community members need protection from others who weaponize the District Court Commissioner system maliciously. Some residents are fully aware of the ability to use a Commissioner in this way. The SA's office will frequently decide to not prosecute cases, but even when they do not move forward with prosecuting a case, extreme damage to the defendant's life has already been done. People have lost jobs and families while defending against false accusations. The financial burden of hiring an attorney, if you are fortunate enough to hire a private attorney, is devastating. The emotional and psychological stress is damaging, as well.

This legislation, if passed, would strengthen current legislation. Complainants would still be able to report incidents with the Commissioners. However, it is our hope that if a complainant understands that charges can only be made by law enforcement or the state's attorney, it may deter someone from filing false statements. Currently, too many people are filing false charges with no fear of accountability. This legislation is a first step in addressing this problem. It would allow the state's attorney's office to focus on prosecuting legitimate cases and working to resolve cases for those who deserve justice.

Therefore, we urge a "Favorable" vote on HB0021.

Thank you.